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SUBJECT: CANADA'S NEW GOVERNMENT TALKS TOUGH ON DRUGS AND CRIME

REF: (A) 05 OTTAWA 03636

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**¶1.** (SBU) Summary: In three speeches over two consecutive days, Canada's new Conservative-led government has underscored the "dire consequences" that underfunded law enforcement and weak sentences have had on increasing rates of drug crime and has offered potentially significant reforms to address the trend. The Conservative Party's "Big Five" point election campaign priorities included proposals for judicial reform. With a speech to the Canadian Professional Police Association (CPPA) plus today's Throne Speech that outlines the legislative agenda, PM Harper has indicated his seriousness about delivering on this campaign promise. End Summary.

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LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES  
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**¶2.** (U) In an April 3 speech to the CPPA, the Prime Minister talked tough about holding criminals to account, putting more police on the streets, promoting a national drug strategy and targeting sex offenders in order to address Canadians' concerns that "the safe streets and safe neighborhoods that Canadians have come to expect as part of our way of life are threatened by rising levels of crime." Justice Minister Vic Toews, in his first public speech as Minister of Justice, bolstered Harper's remarks and promised to rectify the current shortage of some 1000 Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officers in federal, provincial and municipal policing roles.

**¶3.** (SBU) Harper promised to introduce mandatory minimum prison sentences for drug traffickers and, in particular, marijuana grow operators and drug dealers, to promote a national drug prevention and education campaign and to eliminate the former Liberal government's marijuana decriminalization legislation. In May 2003, Canada renewed its 1987 federal Drug Strategy and allocated approximately USD \$355 million annually for programming. The supplementary 2005 National Framework for Action to Reduce the Harms Associated with the Use of Alcohol and Other Drugs and Substances in Canada, developed cooperatively by Health Canada, does not, however, address judicial reforms, but rather focuses on promoting healthy environments and harm reduction, strategies not currently identified as priorities by the new government.

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CANADIANS CONCERNED ABOUT DRUG AND ORGANIZED CRIME LINKS  
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**¶4.** (U) In a survey conducted last week, 24 percent of

Canadians questioned identified the need to reclaim the streets and crack down on crime as the Government's second highest priority, just four points behind support for health care delivery reforms. The growth of organized crime groups, many of which either directly control or indirectly influence all aspects of the illicit drug industry, is of continuing concern to Canadian law enforcement (Reftel A). In 2005, the RCMP identified 108 organized crime groups in British Columbia, doubling the 2003 figure. The public's concern and the Government's response is corroborated by data from the November 2004 Canadian Addiction Survey that reported an increase of alcohol, cannabis and other drug use over the past decade. The most commonly used drugs were alcohol and cannabis, whose use doubled from 7 to 14 percent during the period. Youth between 15 and 24 comprised the most frequent users.

15. (SBU) COMMENT: Canada had mandatory minimums for drug offenses until 1987, when the Supreme Court declared that they violated the Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantee against cruel and unusual punishment. Opposition NDP and Liberal party members have cautioned the Conservatives against enacting sentences that are dramatically higher than those currently contained in the Criminal Code. However, the three opposition parties campaigned under platforms that including tougher penalties for crime and appear sensitive to the public's demands for increased penalties. Justice Minister Vic Toews recently noted to media that the new measures will be introduced piece-by-piece to allow each to proceed through the legislative process on its own, rather than as an omnibus bill that could get delayed on a single point. END COMMENT

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